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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TORONTO 003195

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KCRM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CA](#)

SUBJECT: GUNS AN ELECTION ISSUE IN GREATER TORONTO AREA

REF: TORONTO 2966

Classified By: Consul General Jessica Lecroy for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d) .

¶11. (SBU) Summary: A November poll of Greater Toronto Area (GTA - population 5 million) voters revealed they considered crime to be their second most important issue in the context of the Canadian federal election campaign. Not coincidentally, Toronto is experiencing an unprecedented wave of fatal shootings, with reports of the latest carnage being played up in the Canadian press. How the gun issue will play in the upcoming political campaigns and whether candidates will try to blame the U.S. for the rising violence is yet to be determined. This message provides context for the many factors in play. End Summary.

Gun Crimes Up in Toronto

¶12. (SBU) A poll conducted during the third week of November by EnviroNics Research Corporation for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) revealed that crime was second only to health care as a concern for voters in Canada's largest city (Toronto is 2.5 million; the GTA is 5 million). Recent violent crime statistics support voter concern. There were an unprecedented 72 homicides in Toronto for 2005, and 50 were committed with guns. Both the number of murders and the homicide-by-firearm ratio is the highest in Toronto history. Toronto is still a safe place relative to comparable-sized cities in the U.S. Chicago has virtually the same population as Toronto and 2005 year-to-date has a homicide rate of 13 per 100,000 people. Even with the alarming spike, Toronto's 2005 homicide rate is 2.6 per 100,000 residents, small comfort to Toronto residents.

Gun Violence Is an Election Issue

¶13. (SBU) Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair turned up the heat after a December 1 meeting with Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty by promising to make gun violence an election issue.

Blair also took a swipe at the federal Justice Ministry's refusal to act on Ontario Attorney General Michael Bryant's request to strengthen existing federal firearms statutes (septel) when he said that "Only the federal government can toughen gun laws" (NOTE: Blair's comments came following a November month-long gun surrender and amnesty program conducted by the Toronto Police that netted 250 firearms and 1,500 rounds of ammunition. END NOTE). NDP MP candidate to represent Toronto's Trinity-Spadina riding, Olivia Chow (wife of NDP leader Jack Layton), claimed on the December 5 telecast of the talk show "Focus on Ontario" that 50% of the guns used in Toronto-area crimes were smuggled from the U.S. Gun control activists in Ontario have taken note of the recent decision by a U.S. federal court to allow a New York City lawsuit against gun manufacturers to proceed, despite recent federal legislation that shields gun makers; the suit targets guns smuggled in from other states. The November 18 fatal shooting of 18-year-old Amon Beckles as he emerged from the funeral of an earlier shooting victim appeared to have been the tipping point for Toronto's black community; a future "Gun Summit" with Prime Minister Martin has not yet been scheduled.

NRA and Rapper 50 Cent Aren't Helping U.S. Image

¶14. (SBU) Even the U.S.-based National Rifle Association (NRA) has entered the fray. On December 3, representatives of the NRA's "grassroots division" held a seminar in the Toronto suburb of Scarborough at the annual convention of the Canadian Shooting Sports Association on how to help gun rights candidates (NOTE: Scarborough is one of the relatively few neighborhoods touched by the recent spate of gun violence. END NOTE). Reacting to the visit, Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan said, "The NRA and their U.S.-style, big money gun lobby efforts are not welcome here." Someone else who is not welcome in Canada is rap artist 50 Cent (aka Curtis Jackson). GTA Federal Liberal MP Dan McTeague (Pickering/Scarborough East) led the unsuccessful effort to ban Jackson from a Canadian concert tour because his songs frequently allude to guns and violence. In 2003, an 18-year-old male was shot dead outside a 50 Cent concert in Toronto. 50 Cent was admitted, but only with special permission due to past felony drug charges in the U.S. His

May 2005 visit to Toronto, when he made a brief guest appearance at a downtown club, did not spark the same kind of public debate that his December visit has generated.

15. (C) On December 5 and 6 Ontario Minister of Community Safety and Corrections Monte Kwinter (protect) phoned the CG to review the status of the gun cases. Kwinter reassured the CG that Ontario provincial politicians would try hard to avoid publicly connecting the U.S. to the current gun issue, however, the commonly accepted U.S. nexus might be very hard to avoid. Kwinter briefed the CG on a proposed provincial "guns and gangs operations center" that may operate as an outgrowth of the Toronto Police guns and gangs unit. Kwinter said Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) Commissioner Gwen Boniface would play a big role in the task force and that it would include representatives from the Toronto Police Service and the Ontario Attorney General's office. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) was back-briefed on the proposal. During the course of the conversation, he complained that, "With friends like the NRA, who needs enemies," but added that he understands that the U.S. government "certainly has no control over the activities of the NRA." Kwinter also told the CG that no date had been set for the Gun Summit to be held in Toronto that was promised by Prime Minister Martin during his meeting with representatives of the Coalition of African Canadian Organizations (CACO) November 22.

16. (SBU) Reacting to the spike in gun-related violence, Ontario has promised to fund 1,000 new police officers throughout the province. Toronto will get 250 new officers, though not at once. Toronto Police have reassigned some officers to focus on community policing, but sources close to the Toronto Police Service said that the Service can only train 40 to 50 cadets at a time in its 13-week academy, so the new officers will not begin hitting the streets of Toronto before the new year.

17. (C) Comment: After the CG phoned Minister Kwinter on December 8, he advised that the CBC had just minutes earlier asked him about plans by the province and federal government to make a big announcement on December 9 on the gun issue. Kwinter said he was unaware of plans for such an announcement, but indicated he thought federal officials would leap at the chance to host a "Gun Summit" in Toronto as a publicity magnet during the election campaign. Kwinter's frank discussions with the CG signal that this issue is sure to come up during the federal election campaign despite any efforts by Ontario government officials to avoid pointing a finger at the U.S. 38% of Canada's population lives in Ontario, and the Greater Toronto Area is the political center of gravity for the province. GTA voters are worried about guns, despite the fact that gun crimes are limited to certain areas of the GTA, are only committed by a small number of people, and appear to be mainly gang-related. We have received indications that political considerations may begin to influence bilateral law enforcement cooperation, though operational cooperation with the ATF remain excellent. The gun issue may also likely be raised in Ambassador Wilkins' December 15 editorial board meeting with Toronto's "Sun" newspaper, which is law and order focused. End Comment.

18. (U) This message was cleared by Consulate A/LEGATT, ICE Attache, and ATF Assistant Country Attache.

LECROY